

# Truro Police Department

## Fire Emergencies

*Policy Number: OPS-9.02*

*Effective Date: June 1, 2000*

**REFERENCE:**

**Accreditation Standards:**

**Mass. Gen. Law: Chap. 89 sec 7A, 268 sec 32A**

**Other:**

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**Policy:**

It is the policy of the Truro Police Department to preserve life, protect property, and prevent crime in fire emergencies.

The role of the police at a fire scene is to furnish close cooperation with the fire department and to assist in the preservation of life, the protection of property, the prevention of crime, the establishment of fire lines, the control of crowds, and the direction of vehicular traffic.

Although the fire department is the public agency directly responsible for the handling of fires, the police also have an important part to play. Because of the nature of the primary patrol function, especially during the nighttime and early morning hours, the police are often the first on the scene, first to discover a fire, and first to alert and assist the occupants of a burning building.

Police officers must also be aware of the possibility of arson and be observant for any person acting suspiciously at a fire scene. It should be noted, however, that the basic responsibility for the investigation of fires of incendiary or suspicious origin is with the Truro Fire Department (Mass. Gen. Law Chap. 148, sec. 2) who may call the State Fire Marshal's Office at the State Department of Public Safety, or the Truro Police Department for assistance.

Police officers, as part of their regular patrol duties, should also note and report upon any conditions, which could constitute a potential fire, hazard for transmission to the Truro Fire Department.

## **Procedures:**

1. Fires discovered by police officers shall be reported IMMEDIATELY.
2. When a fire is reported, the officer shall record:
  - a. The time of alarm.
  - b. Any other matter of potential importance to units arriving on the scene.
3. If the police department is notified of a fire by a citizen the officer receiving the call shall:
  - a. Request information of the nature of the fire, including exact location.
  - b. Try to ascertain if building is occupied (people trapped or unaccounted for).
  - c. Advise any persons to remain a safe distance away for fire personnel to arrive.
  - d. Request the identity of the caller.
4. **Upon notification of a fire by any means, the Officer shall notify the Communications Center.**
  - a. The police officers shall assist fire personnel if called upon at the scene.
  - b. Only police units dispatched to the scene shall respond. If the Shift Commander responds to the scene, he shall notify communications.
  - c. If police vehicles follow fire apparatus to a scene, the officers must keep a safe distance behind the apparatus to avoid a collision should a firefighter or piece of equipment fall from the apparatus.
5. **If a police officer is present at the scene of a fire prior to the arrival of the fire department, the officer shall:**
  - a. **IMMEDIATELY NOTIFY THE 911 DISPATCH CENTER** with location and description of fire incident before taking any remedial action.
  - b. Warn occupants of any buildings involved by the fire and adjacent areas to escape and seek refuge.
    1. This may be accomplished by use of the siren and public address system in the officer's cruiser.
  - c. An officer should not attempt to enter a fire involved building unless doing so is necessary to save human lives and the risk to his own life is not unreasonable.
    1. If the officer decides that entry of the building is necessary, the officer shall notify the Communications Center that he/she is entering building.

2. The officer should not open any door which is hot to the touch as this indicates the presence of fire inside.
3. Opening of doors and windows will accelerate the fire and could possibly cause a "flashover" or back draft explosion. Don't break windows to let out smoke. If heavy smoke conditions exists, firefighters with proper protective gear and positive pressure self-contained breathing apparatus and charged hose lines are necessary prior to any attempt to open doors and entering structure. Evacuees and the officer should keep their heads low and crawl on their hands and knees until they are outside the building, in order to avoid inhalation of smoke and toxic gases.
- d. Officers shall prevent any person who has exited a fire involved building from re-entering the building until the fire is out and permission is received from the fire department officer in command.
- e. The officer should take reasonable emergency measures to inhibit the spread of fire, if possible, but do so without unnecessary risks, especially if human life is not presently endangered by the fire.
- f. To the extent possible, any officers on the scene before the arrival of the fire department, should make note of such things as:
  1. The part of the structure that is on fire and flames are visible.
  2. The amount, color and location of the heaviest smoke.
  3. The direction of the wind, if any.
  4. The presence of any odors that may suggest gasoline, kerosene, paint thinner or other accelerates that may be burning in the fire. Such evidence may be crucial to a subsequent arson investigations.
- g. A brief description of information available should be given to first arriving fire officer (ex. all occupants are out of the building and accounted for). Again, on arrival of the Fire Chief, any available information should be communicated briefly.
6. Upon arrival, patrol cars shall be positioned outside the fire lines in such a manner that they do not obstruct the passage of fire or other emergency vehicles. **\*REMOVE THE CRUISER FROM DIRECTLY IN FRONT OF FIRE BUILDING. IT IS EXTREMELY IMPORTANT THAT THE FIRE APPARATUS HAVE ADEQUATE ACCESS TO ALL FOUR SIDES OF THE BURNING BUILDING. AERIAL LADDERS MUST BE ABLE TO BE POSITIONED IN FRONT OF (OR IN CLOSE PROXIMITY TO THE BUILDING) IN ORDER TO FACILITATE RESCUE AND VENTILATION OPERATIONS.** Every precaution shall be made to avoid vehicles being blocked so that they are unable to further respond.
7. After officers have done as much as is reasonably possible to preserve life and to secure the scene for firefighting personnel, the officer's attention should be directed toward the detection of

any suspicious persons or circumstances which might suggest that the fire is the result of a criminal act. Officers should identify and interview anyone who arrived at the scene before the first police and fire units or who make mention of having observed any suspicious people in the vicinity.

**8.** The patrol car shall be kept available for communications to facilitate requests for additional aid or to send messages.

**9.** Additional units dispatched or arriving at the scene shall cover the most appropriate positions for performing all necessary police services.

**10.** The shift commander is in charge unless relieved by a higher ranking officer.

**11.** The patrol supervisor shall designate a location that will serve as a possible command post if it appears police involvement will continue for a long time.

**a.** The officer in charge will appoint another officer to take charge pending his return if he is called away.

**b.** Officers arriving at the scene shall report to the command post for orders.

**12.** Cooperation with the fire department is essential. To this end, the police at the scene shall:

**a.** Establish fire lines and maintain, extend or contract the lines as requested by the fire department, including the closing off of streets whenever necessary.

**b.** Remove any vehicles within the lines that interfere with the movement of firefighters.

**c.** Prevent vehicles from passing over fire hoses unless directed otherwise by a member of the fire department. (Mass. Gen. Law Chap. 89 sec. 7A)

**d.** Ensure that access to hydrants is unobstructed at all times.

**e.** Provide other forms of assistance as requested.

**13.** Crowds, an inevitable element of fires, shall be kept a safe distance from the fire. This will ensure the safety of the persons gathered and prevent interference with the fire department.

**14.** Police officers shall not permit any person through the fire lines except members of the fire department, police department, and Ambulance Emergency Medical Personnel, without approval of the Fire Chief or senior fire official on scene.

**15.** Police officers shall take steps to safeguard fire and police apparatus at the scene. Persons interfering with apparatus or extinguishing efforts shall be arrested if necessary (Mass. Gen. Law Chap. 268 sec. 32A).

**16.** After the arrival of fire department personnel, police officers shall not enter the fire building unless:

- a.** It is absolutely necessary to do so to save a life or
- b.** A request to do so is made by the Fire Chief or Senior Fire Officer for the performance of a proper police function.

**17.** Police officers shall remain at the scene to guard against looting until the fire is extinguished and the area is secured, consistent with their responsibilities to the rest of the community.

**18.** Emergency Shelter. A determination of need for shelter shall be made by the Truro Fire Department.. If a need has been established then the appropriate agency will be contacted (ie. Red Cross, Salvation Army, etc).

**19.** The officer in charge at the fire shall have responsibility for filing a complete police report if requested on the fire and may direct other officers to submit reports.

**20.** Police investigating a fire scene must comply with all legal standards pertaining to when searches can be made without a criminal or administrative search warrant and when a criminal or administrative search warrant must be obtained.